

# ***Treaty Trail: U.S. Indian Treaty councils in the North west***

## **CHRONOLOGY AND LOCATION OF TREATY COUNCILS EAST OF THE CASCADES**

Washington Territory Governor Isaac Stevens intended to make treaties with the Indians to secure the necessary resources for building the railroad and to obtain land sought by the ever-increasing stream of settlers flowing into the region.

### **The Walla Walla Treaty Council: Walla Walla Valley**

News of the western treaties had quickly passed to the eastern Washington tribes, along with sad tales from the nation's interior and East concerning the plight of the tribes in those regions.

Washington tribes were aware that Indian lands had been ceded, but fair compensation and services had not been received in exchange for lands. They were understandably wary of Stevens and the treaty proceedings.

Although the Nez Perce,

traditionally friendly to the whites, readily agreed to attend the Walla Walla Council, the Yakama, Walla Walla, and Cayuse bands were initially very reluctant to participate. Despite their misgivings, however, the Council formally convened on May 29, 1855, with thousands of tribal members in attendance.

The chiefs at the Walla Walla Council were firm, businesslike negotiators, sure of their strength and confident in their negotiating skills. When faced with the inevitable decline of their way of life, they sought to gain the best treaty terms possible. Stevens was forced to make compromises, and the Walla Walla Treaty was signed by all the tribes present.

### **The Walla Walla, Cayuse and Umatilla Treaty Council: Mill Creek, Washington**

**Treaty signed: June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1855**

**Tribes:** Cayuse, Umatilla

### **The Yakama Treaty Council: Mill Creek, Washington**

**Treaty signed: June 9<sup>th</sup> 1855**

**Tribes:** Yakama, Palouse, Pisquouse, Wenatshapam, Klikatat, Klinquit, Kowwas-say-ee, Li-ay-was, Skin-pah, Wish-ham, Shyiks, Ochechotes, Yakama, Palouse Pisquouse, Wenatshapam, Klikatat

**The Nez Perce Treaty  
Council:  
Mill Creek, Washington**

**Treaty signed: June  
11, 1855**

**Tribe:** Nez Perce

*Bloods Come Into Council, Blackfoot  
County, 1855* by

Gustav Sohon is the artist's  
interpretation of a scene  
at the Blackfeet Council with four  
Blood Indians riding  
into camp on horseback. Two men  
are shown in the  
foreground, one carrying a large  
American flag and  
shooting a gun into the air.

**Washington State Historical  
Society Collections.**

**Hell Gate Treaty  
Council:  
Missoula, Montana**

Proceeding further east,  
into what is now  
Montana, Stevens met  
with the Flathead,  
Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and  
Kootenai tribes. These  
tribes were under constant  
attack by the Blackfeet  
Indians, so Stevens  
promised that he would  
procure easement rights  
from the Blackfeet to  
allow the tribes to hunt on  
the plains east of the  
Rocky Mountains.

Once again, Stevens's  
again, Stevens's  
misunderstanding of tribal  
culture created conflict at  
the proceedings, and  
angry words were  
exchanged before an  
agreement was finally  
reached.

**Treaty signed: July 16<sup>th</sup> 1855**

**Tribes:** Flathead, Kootenay, Upper Pend  
d'Oreilles

**The Blackfeet Treaty Council:  
Fort Benton, Montana**

Three tribes comprised the Blackfeet  
Nation—the Blackfeet of the north, the  
Piegan, and the Blood. These three,  
sharing kinship ties, customs, a common  
language, and traditional enemies, were  
collectively the most powerful and feared  
tribes of the region. They actively  
resisted the activities of American  
explorers and fur traders.

Fifty-nine chiefs attended the Blackfeet  
Council, including delegates from tribes  
west of the Bitterroot Mountains. Three  
thousand five hundred Blackfeet, Nez  
Perce, Flathead, Salish, Kootenai, and  
Pend d'Oreille Indians attended the  
council, and once again Stevens  
persuaded the tribes to sign a treaty with  
the United States.

**Treaty signed: October 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Tribes: Blackfoot Nation:** Piegan,  
Blood, Blackfeet, Gros Ventres

**Flathead Nation:** Flathead, Pend  
d'Oreille, Kootenay, Nez Perce

**War Breaks Out**

Twelve days after the Walla Walla Treaty  
was signed but before it was ratified by  
Congress, the *Oregon Weekly Times*  
prematurely published this  
announcement: "By an express provision  
of the treaty, the country embraced by  
the cession (lands given up by the  
Indians) and not included in the  
reservation is open to settlement..." This  
announcement sent streams of settlers  
and gold seekers to lands east of the  
Cascades, igniting outrage among the  
tribes and eventually driving the Yakamas  
to war against the intruders.

While Stevens was still returning from the Blackfeet Council, he learned of warfare in the Territory. Proceeding on through the Bitterroot Mountains and into the Spokane River valley, Stevens demanded a council with the chiefs of the Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Colville, and Isle de Pierre tribes.

### **The Spokane Treaty Council Dec. 5th, 1855**

The Spokane Council was unique: of the four councils held in the eastern part of the Territory, this was the only one that did not produce a treaty. Stevens had a true dialog with an Indian leader, Spokan Garry who had been educated by the Hudson's Bay Company mission school and spoke excellent English. His wisdom and command of the language placed Stevens in defensive position. Although no treaty was signed, Stevens counted the council as a minor victory since it had secured a promise from the Spokane that they would not join with the Yakamas to create an alliance against settlers.

#### **Sources:**

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